

### *Discusses Health Insurance Reform Concerns with Over 18,000 Constituents*

**SCOTTSDALE** - U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell yesterday held two live telephone town halls on health insurance reform with more than 18,000 residents of Arizona's Fifth District participating. The first, sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), drew over 4,400 seniors from across the district. The second, which was open to district residents of all ages, allowed Mitchell to answer more than two dozen questions from over 14,000 participants.

"This is an issue that is intensely personal and affects us all - even those with whom we may disagree," Mitchell said. "Ultimately, however, everyone wants the same thing: the best, most affordable health care for us and our loved ones. Democrats and Republicans both agree that we're facing a crisis, that the status quo is unsustainable, and that we need insurance reform. The key is how we get there. Many folks are concerned about the state of our health insurance system and the pending proposals in Congress, so receiving input and feedback from as many constituents as I can is important, especially as Congress continues to debate the issue."

During the telephone town halls, Mitchell fielded a wide variety of questions from a large spectrum of constituents both in support of, and in opposition to the current proposals being debated in Congress. Mitchell reiterated that at present there is not a singular bill ready for a vote.

Mitchell took questions from constituents on many of the controversial elements of the proposals currently under debate. Mitchell reiterated his concerns about the public option as currently written in H.R. 3200, but said that he could support an alternative to private insurance if crafted fairly that would spur competition among private insurers. Specifically, Mitchell cited the proposed use of artificially low Medicare reimbursement rates in a recent draft which he feared would create an unfair playing field with private insurers and reduce competition and choice for patients. In addition, these unfairly low reimbursement rates could lead to lower payments to doctors and hospitals.

Mitchell once again voiced his opposition to a government takeover of the health care system, as well as his belief that reform should provide more choice, not less, and that consumers should maintain the freedom to choose their own health care plan.

Mitchell heard from seniors worried that reform would put additional strain on the Medicare system and leave seniors with fewer options. Mitchell reiterated his belief that reform should not reduce the level of service seniors receive through Medicare. Mitchell said that he backs efforts to address waste and fraud in the Medicare system, but would not support a plan that could lead to erosion in benefits or rationed care. Both Mitchell and his wife, who are over 65, are covered by Medicare and do not participate in any health insurance plan offered to members of Congress or federal employees.

Mitchell also heard from constituents with concerns that health insurance reform might benefit illegal immigrants or eliminate restrictions on federal funding for abortion. Mitchell reiterated his belief that reform should not benefit people who are in the country illegally or change existing law which prohibits federal funding of abortions.

Earlier that day, Mitchell took part in another live telephone town hall, sponsored by the AARP, and fielded more than 20 questions from the over 4,400 District 5 AARP members who took part in the hour-long event.

Mitchell encouraged participants on both calls to visit his web site ( [www.mitchell.house.gov](http://www.mitchell.house.gov) ) for additional information, which contains links to nonpartisan sources. He also encouraged participants to call and email his office to let him know their views.